

NEWS NOTES

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NEWS NOTES

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The Unfunnies

BY ANDREW MOSS

"If big business and big government didn't work together," Daddy Warbucks once said, "pretty soon big business and government would both go out of business with one loud crash."

"Br-r," says Annie, "sure don't want that."

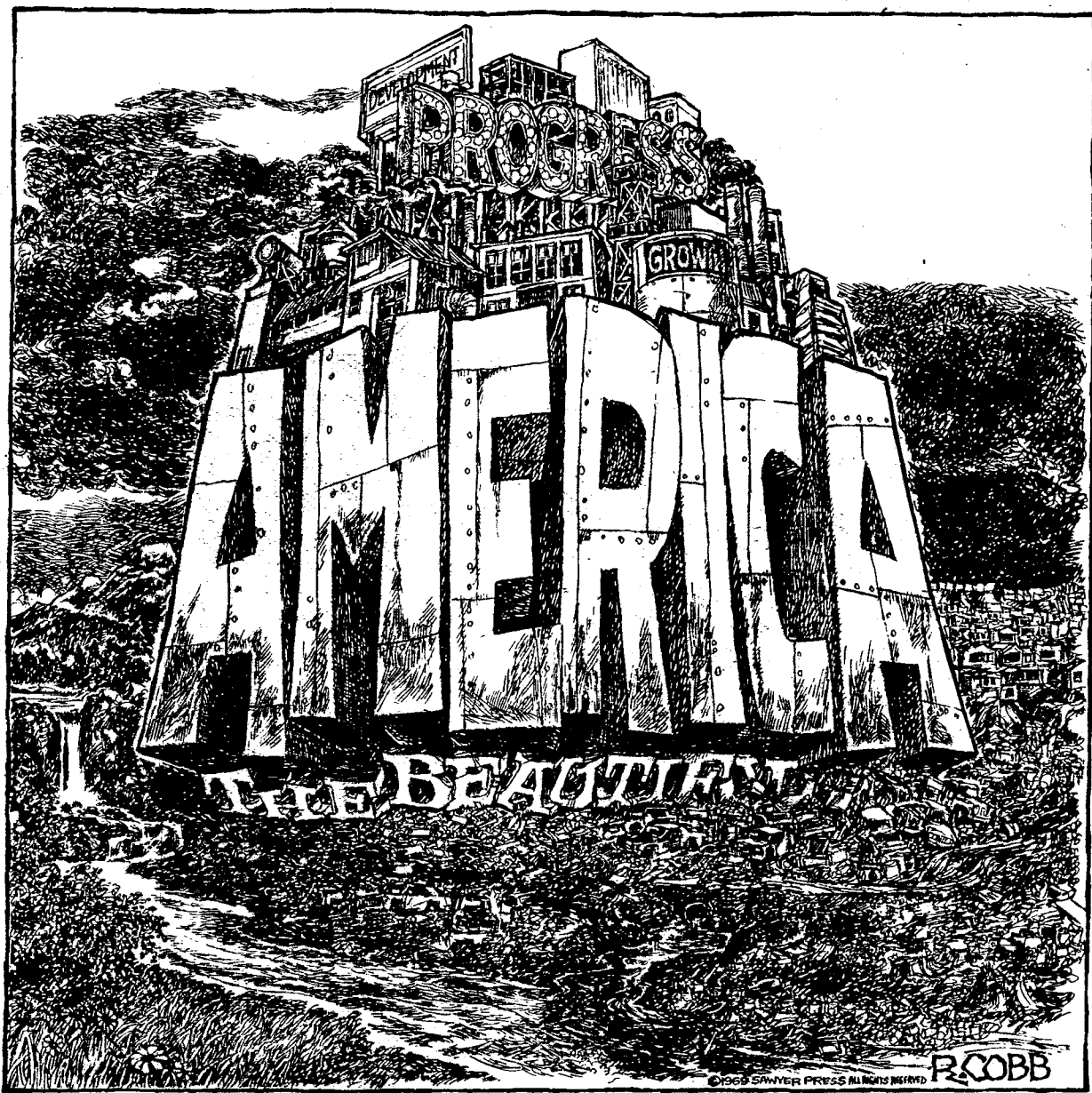
"When I poked fun at Joe McCarthy everybody got scared," said Walt Kelly, creator of Pogo. Some papers cancelled with the excuse that it was against their policy to have politics in comics. But I notice that when I poked fun at the communists in Pogo, nobody cancelled."



Everybody knows there is politics in the comics. Almost everything that goes into the mass media is political; it has to be because anything that conveys opinions to huge numbers of people makes politics. And a lot of people read the comics -- about a hundred million people every day, more than read the editorials, or the sports pages, or anything else in the papers except the headlines. If you want to get to a lot of people, write yourself a syndicated comic strip.

Recently, comic strips have discovered the student revolution. Bob Lubbers's Robin Malone, a dreary fantasy about a sexy lady tycoon,

FROM LNS and the Peninsular Observer, a west-coast newspaper.



was half way through an episode about Robin's baseball team -- will handsome Hickory Stone pull the Robins out of the mud and screw the owner? -- when Lubbers suddenly saw the front page's student unrest. He promptly snuck in Malone U., a wholly owned university run by a president who looks suspiciously like Sanford's former president Wallace Sterling. The calm of Malone U. is threatened by the Students for Democracy (oh yeah?), a collection of longhaired peace faggots. Currently the Students for Democracy are holding the administration building, and Robin is about to call in Hickory and the baseball team to straighten them out.

Alex Kotzky's Apartment 3G jumped on the bandwagon about a week later. Kotzky promoted his resident academic, one Professor Papagoras, to acting president of the university just in time for him to be overrun by his resident peace creeps. Papagoras is also getting blackmailed by his local underground newspaper. ("Typical of all so-called underground newspapers, practically all the material is juvenile," the strip informs us.)

At least 3G's student agitators



look like human beings, but, as in Robin Malone, their motivations and their politics don't really enter into the action. The students are misguided, led astray by outside agitators, deluded by the underground press.

Archie and Li'l Abner have joined the action, Archie with a high school sit-in and Abner with a Berkeley-style revolt in Slobberia. Even Pogo is beginning to stir -- "all these modern rebels gives me a pain," says Howland Owl. No doubt by the time the various House and Senate investigating agencies get into their various student-inquisition routines the strips will be full of stern but fatherly administrators putting down

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READ NEWS NOTES

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1978 or bust

The MEDCO plan

"The future is a great land; a man cannot go around it in a day; he cannot measure it with a bound; he cannot bind its harvests into a single sheaf. It is wider than the vision, and has no end.

-- D. G. Mitchell (1850)

BACK in 1964, economist Leon Keyserling wrote a pamphlet called "Progress or Poverty," in which he argued for a massive increase in federal expenditures for domestic programs, an end to tight money, about a million lower-middle to low-income housing starts a year, a \$2 minimum wage, a billion dollars a year more for public works, and similar efforts in other fields, as the most logical approach to ending the national curse of poverty. A significant element in the Keyserling argument was that these programs would not only help the poor, but everyone. Contradicting conservatives who foresaw national collapse behind every new federal expenditure, Keyserling argued that a spending government made a happy nation -- that the common fear that the poor could only improve their lot at the expense of the non-poor was worse than immoral; it was illogical.

Said Keyserling of his strategy: "This does not imply harsh nor 'revolutionary' redistributive programs, taking away from some to give to others. The policies and programs most immediately needed to help the poor and deprived might change some income 'shares' slightly in the short-run. But these programs would hurt nobody even in the short-run; and in the longer run, they would immeasurably benefit all, by improving our totaleconomic performance so much that there will be much more for all. Economic 'soundness' and social justice are one and inseparable in the United States."

It's now five years later, and the nation -- after a long psychic involvement in something misnamed a "war on poverty" -- finds itself still faced with the same problems and a packet of new ones as well. There is strong reason to suspect that, in important ways, the Keyserling program would have brought us -- if not to economic utopia -- at least to a point substantially ahead of where we are right now. At the very least the economic problems of the nation would have been eased to the point where we could deal with them with more rationality than is currently the case.

There was, however, a soft spot in the Keyserling strategy. It would have redistributed income and it showed some eminently sensible ways to do so. But it would not have redistributed power. When Keyserling said that "these programs would hurt nobody" he was drinking deeply at the liberal cup. Liberal leaders have consistently sought to ease the discomfort of the poor and the repressed while not fundamentally changing the power structure in which they have such a vested interest. Their basic argument has been what's good for the people must also be good for General Motors, and people's progress has been defined and limited by what was good for General Motors.

It is this flaw in the liberal doctrine -- progress without power -- that has been strongly challenged by the black rebellion in recent years. Black militancy has spawned a number of economic irregulars, who reject the liberal compromises and who argue forcefully that black progress cannot be attained without black power.

Here in the District, Marion Barry has served for a number of years as the maitre d' of local black economic populism. While the federal and local governments have continued on their bland, ineffective, paternalistic ways -- never daring to approach the level of largesse recommended by Keyserling -- Barry has immersed himself in the problem of the economics of black power. His laboratory, Pride, Inc., has been a remarkable demonstration of the symbiotic relationship between power and economic advancement. It has produced, admittedly,

very limited quantitative results. But allowing for size, the economic, psychological and political achievements of Pride have been substantial. It is a viable, tangible, living example of black power on the march -- not merely protesting, not merely demanding, not merely theorizing, but moving.

Among those who have worked closely with Barry has been Carroll Harvey. Academicians who move back and forth from campus assignments to government jobs have been called "in-and-outers." Harvey is an "in-and-outer" too. Only instead of moving from campus to Washington, he moves from community to the District Building and back again. His "in" jobs have been in the field of community renewal and more recently as MEDCO staff director. His "out" time has been spent in part in close association with Barry, working in Pride and other projects.

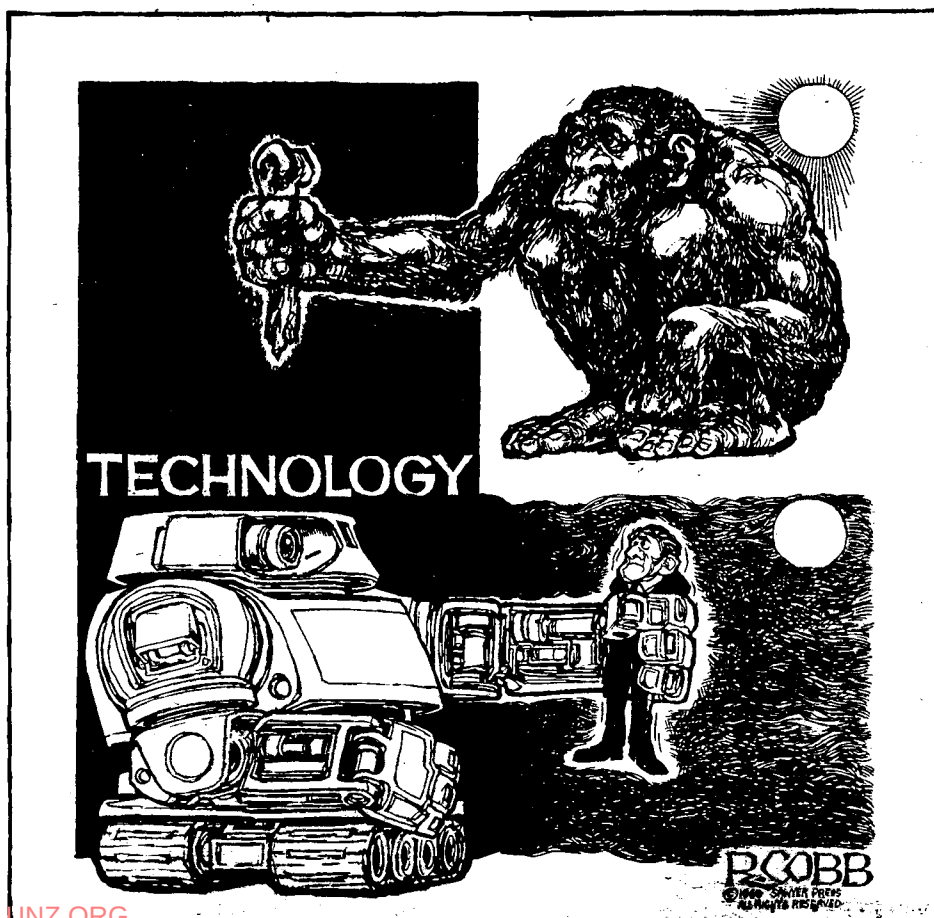
Two sections

THIS may seem a rather lengthy preface to a discussion of the Mayor's Economic Development Committee's master plan for the District, but it is impossible to consider this bulky document without some consideration of these three men. For their influence has made the report worth considering and has lifted it above the normal vapid quality of such papers.

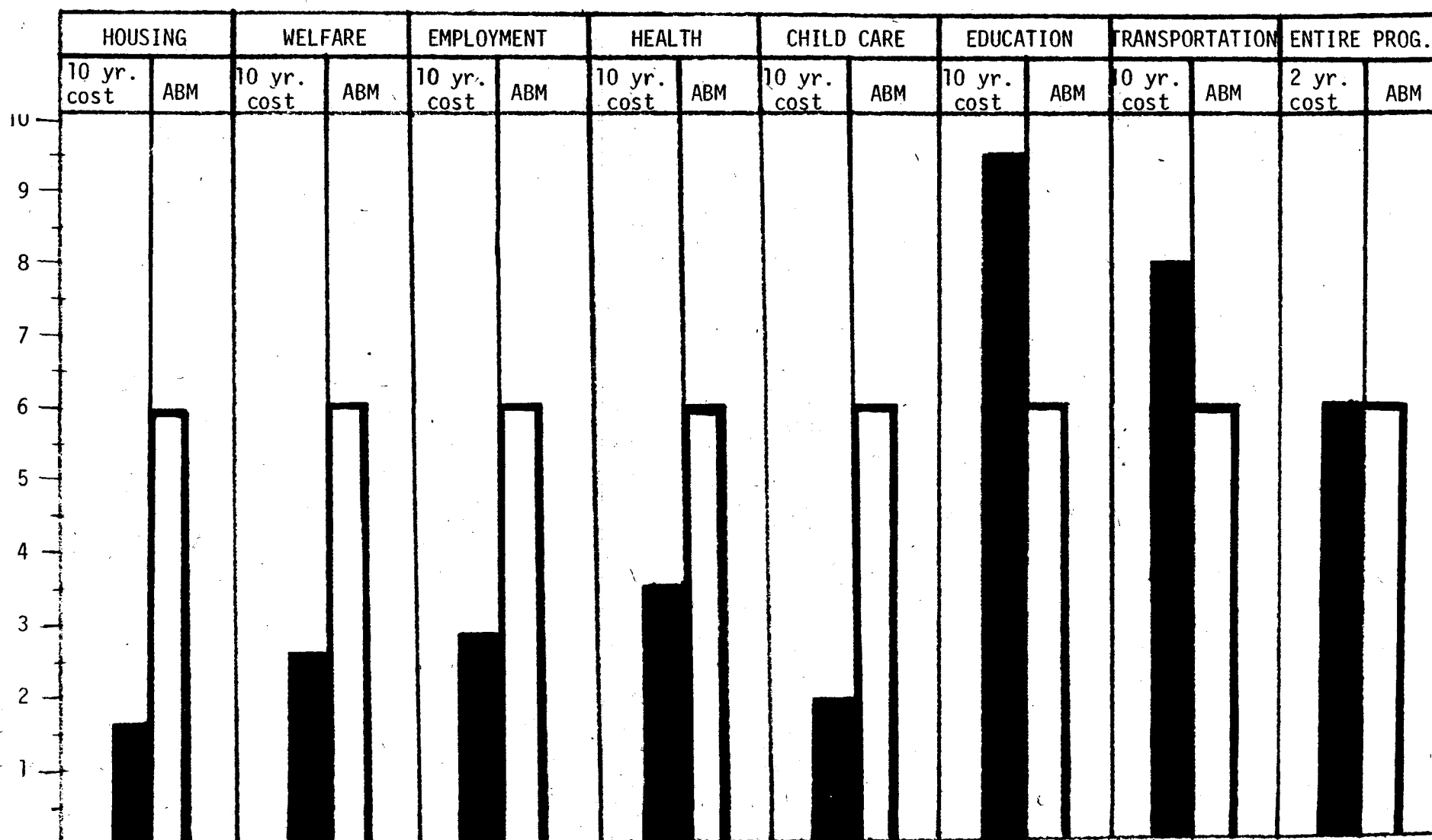
The report represents not so much a confluence of their thought as a bringing of it together in close proximity. The report is divided into two major sections. One, the master plan, is pure Keyserling on the wing, the national version of his scheme miniaturized to fit within DC boundaries. Keyserling has kept the faith over the years. He still insists, rightly, that "income is fundamental to all else within the scope of an economic plan." And he remains confident that "we easily have the resources, to meet our great priorities, without hurt but rather with benefit to all."

Some things have changed. The Keyserling standard of income has risen. Further, his 1964 projections, based on what would happen if his program were followed, would have left 3 million Americans living in poverty by 1975. He said his programs couldn't do better than that but added, hopefully, that "by then, we should have come to accept the principle that our society should adopt whatever programs appear necessary to assure at least a tolerable level of living for all."

Since 1964, interest in a guaranteed annual income has grown to the point where Keyserling could use it to pick up the residue of Washingtonians left out by job programs and other governmental efforts, and have the concept approved by a group as diverse as MEDCO.



ABM vs. economic development



WHILE the cost of carrying out the proposals of the District's economic development plan seems high, this chart gives an interesting comparison with another proposed governmental expenditure: a Washington area ABM site. The graphs compare the cost of the various components of the MEDCO plan with the cost of establishing

an ABM site in or around Washington. Figures are in hundreds of millions of dollars. The ABM figure does not allow for cost overruns, annual operation, maintenance and replacement or continued research and development. (Chart by Washington Area Citizens Against ABM.)

The ten year price tag on this program, according to Keyserling, is \$236 million. (The total public cost to carry out the entire MEDCO plan comes to roughly \$2.9 billion, with approximately two-thirds of this sum to be borne by the federal government. This would be over and above the expected \$5 to \$6 billion increase in normal District expenditures during the same period. For an interesting comparison between these costs and the price of establishing an ABM site in or near the District, see the chart above.

Keyserling argues that the necessary expenditures will pay off in an economic growth dividend that will leave all the residents of the city better off than they would be if they hadn't spent the money.

The second aspect of the report is a first-year action plan, drawn up under the direction of Harvey. Harvey's association with the MEDCO plan has been an auspicious one (as has been the presence of Barry on the MEDCO board), for the first year action plan not only reflects Keyserling's emphasis on income as a first priority and the necessity of job payoffs in all development, but Harvey's and Barry's recognition of the importance of thinking black as you go.

Exciting, frustrating

THE combination of these two documents has resulted in a conception that is both exciting and frustrating. The broad outlines are appealing, but there are also large gaps.

The plan, for example, seems unduly complacent about population growth. It does not deal in any adequate manner with the issue of whether a city the size of Washington should attempt to limit population rather than encourage its growth. Admittedly, any plan to limit population will probably be ineffective without national action. Still, one cannot casually suggest raising height restrictions on buildings so as to produce 40,000 more housing units without accepting responsibility for increasing the density of human beings in the city -- which is, after all, a prime factor in the urban crisis. A complete long-range plan must deal with the issue of population.

Raising height restrictions raises still other problems. Harvey points to the necessity of a strict disposition policy concurrent with any such change. Such a disposition policy would, theoretically, prevent the sort of disposition that took place in the SW urban renewal, where black people's homes were taken and the land turned over to the Rockefeller family to build L'Enfant Plaza. It would, theoretically, prevent the new tall buildings from merely being another conglomeration of white collar job centers, a Rosslyn downtown. Harvey believes that with the right sort of disposition policy and the right sort of zoning commission, the raising of height restrictions can be used to create jobs and housing for the people who need them. Past history is not so reassuring. For those most able to make use of such zoning changes are those least likely to make use of it for the general good. In addition, of course, there is the aesthetic question. Washington is one of the few cities where one can see the sky almost anywhere without neck strain. It is worth more than a little to retain this virtue.

The plan proposes major industrial and residential development of the Anacostia River Basin. It suggests, for example, that the Navy Yard site be used for industrial development, a far more useful purpose than the middle-class office buildings proposed by the National Capital Planning Commission in its 1985 plan. There is no question but what the Anacostia River Basin is a great underutilized resource of the city. But the plan's talk of 55,000 housing units and 6200 new jobs leaves unclear whether open space extremely valuable to the city for non-economic reasons (such as the Arboretum and the Kingman Lake area) will be gobbled up in the name of development and improving the tax base. Whatever the intentions of the planners are, they should be explicit in

the plan and not left to the vagaries of the future. If the District is to support Anacostia Basin development it needs to know right from the start just what sort of development is envisaged and where.

The plan calls for an income floor of \$2000 for unrelated individuals and \$4500 for families. While this is a substantial improvement over the present situation, it seems a miserly goal for a nation as rich as ours to set for the decade ahead. (A similar complaint concerning minimum wages was expressed in the last issue.)

The plan also fails to deal adequately with the issue of metropolitanism. It treats metropolitanism as though it were an undisputedly good thing. Yet there is growing evidence to suggest that it will substantially weaken the power of the cities at a time when their need is increased power.

The plan, by failing to come down hard against more freeways, by supporting a municipal parking authority and the downtown development plan, displays a major weakness. At these junctures, it stops being a people's plan and becomes a big business plan.

Another major drawback is the lack of any ecological planning. There is little in the plan to suggest how the District will become more livable as we make economic progress. We have too many monuments already to the failure to consider this issue.

Perhaps the most critical point that must be raised about the report is its feasibility. Talking with Harvey about what could be leaves one with a certain Panglossian euphoria. But Harvey and Barry and Keyserling are not yet running the city. Is there any reason to believe that Walter Washington won't mangle the whole Anacostia River Basin as badly as he has mangled Fort Lincoln? Is there any reason to believe that the Rockefellers won't be back in town when land is up for grabs?

Democratic Central Committee chairman Bruce Terris raised the question of feasibility at the recent MEDCO hearings:

"Your report contains some rather unclear language that we can even expand our budget for defense while meeting the problems of the cities. Perhaps this is true

as a matter of economic theory but it is not true as a matter of practical politics. If Lyndon Johnson, who was reputed to be a liberal Democrat, could not produce guns and butter, is Richard Nixon likely to? If we expect to have funds for programs such as those in your report, we had better hope and pray that the Senate eliminates funds for the ABM and other wasteful weapons systems.

"... The action plan completely ignores whether governmental organization exists with the power and competence to carry out the program. While the overall program devotes one page to this critical problem it does little more than supply an outline. Yet this is perhaps the most vital issue. The District government has shown little capacity to organize itself and to provide competent leadership for much simpler programs than the ones suggested in your report."

ALL these criticisms and complaints do not detract from the fact that this plan is considerably more than we have been capable of in the past. The plan does need revision and it needs a clearer vision of how to implement the proposals, but it has already helped to free us from the turgid planning procedures that have hindered the District in the past. The myopic little men at the District Building and the Planning Commission who, in their frantic, futile efforts to catch up with the past thought they were gaining on the future, may not have met the best -- but they have certainly met their betters. It is indicative perhaps that one of the least imaginative and useful pieces of testimony offered at the MEDCO hearings came from Charles Conrad, staff director of the Planning Commission. In the short time available to it, MEDCO has far outshone the NCPC's 1985 plan.

The attributes of the plan are substantial. Among them:

- The acceptance of the concept of guaranteed income.
- The linking of development, at every step, with increases in income and jobs.
- The emphasis not only on black economic advancement but on black economic power.

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OPUS SUN/LNS

UNFUNNIES

from page 2

bestial peace creeps with the aid of the campus jocks.

In Robin Malone those jocks average about a foot taller than the Students for Democracy. The jocks are conventionally handsome, studious -- they carry books under their arms -- and chivalrous. Comics editorialize graphically; heroic upshots of the clean-cuts make them look like supermen with brains; long down shots of the Students For Democracy make them look like a swarm of insects. When a jock slugs an insect his moral sanction has already been established graphically -- the jock is clean and pretty, he's big and, since he's in the foreground, he must be right. The president of Malone U. is your mother's fantasy of a white-haired elder statesman; a man like that couldn't possibly be in the wrong. He and Robin plan their counter-action in front of a giant portrait of Eisenhower; if America's chief fetish smiles on what you do, you could hardly lose.



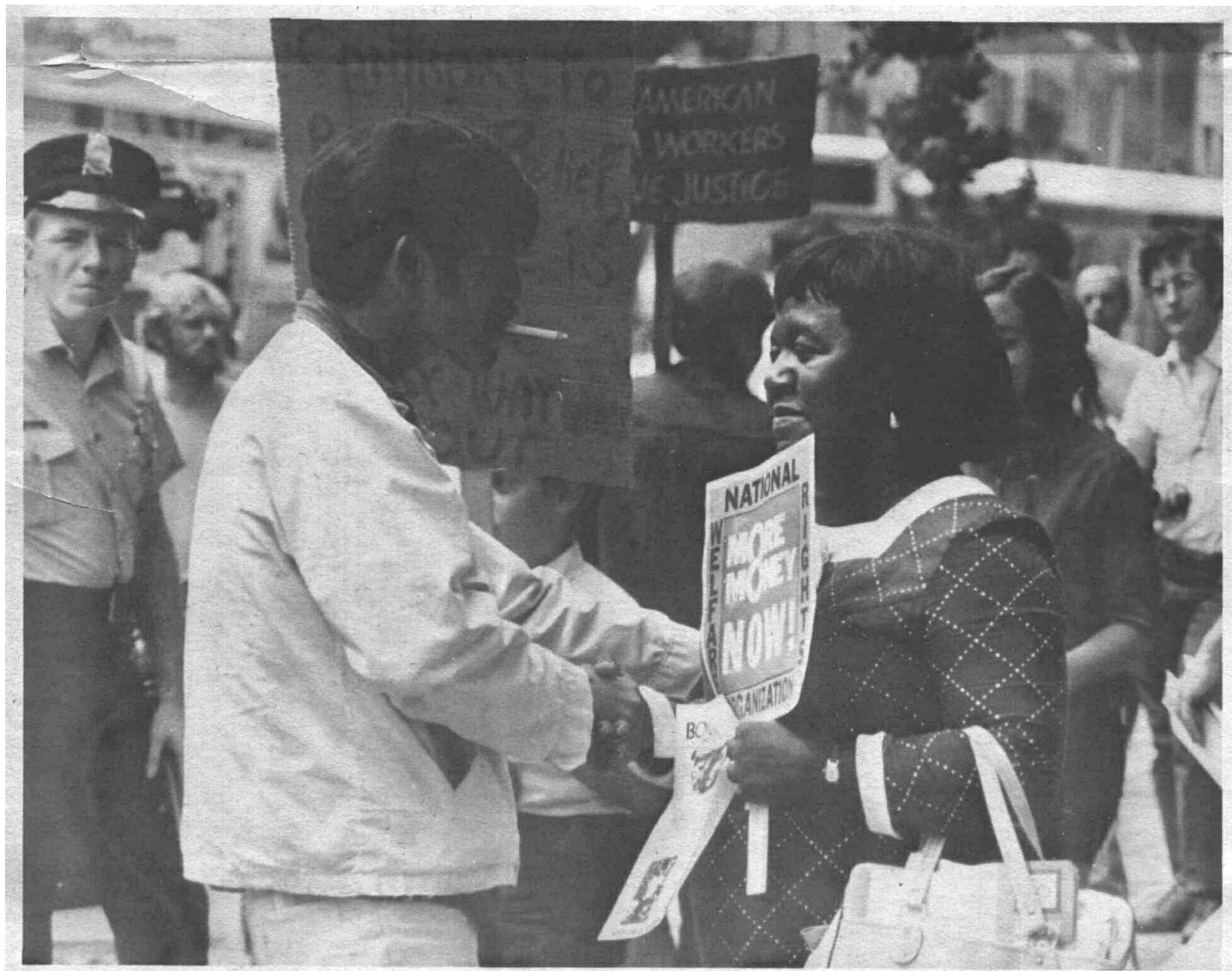
3G uses a different trick to legitimize the university authorities. Papagoras is one of the continuing heroes in the strip from past episodes; we know he's a kindly old father figure. When he slugs a rebellious student he has all his previously established authority behind him. Identifying power with a hero's charisma is an old propaganda trick, and a natural for the comics,

Robin Malone and 3G are small, advance warnings of how the popular culture supports repression from above. Repression works by identifying right with constituted authority; in the strips the identification is made by having the strip heroes become, or support, consti-

tuted authority and by slanting the graphics so that authority has all the desirable attributes -- wealth, power, beauty -- and its opponents none. The real background of the events that the strip is talking about can be ignored; the readers will identify with an empty-headed female tycoon because she is the heroine.

Popular culture used to have heroes who weren't identified with authority -- Chaplin's little man, Art Carney in "The Honeymooners," even Li'l Abner once. But when society is falling apart, the mass media have a job to do: they have to maintain the consensus.

INTRODUCE NEWS NOTES TO OTHERS



GRAPE BOYCOTT'S MANUEL VASQUEZ AND WELFARE RIGHT'S ETTA HORNE
AT LOCAL DEMONSTRATION. (PHOTO BY A. W. SCHRAM)

SMOKEY THE BEAR SUTRA

Once in the Jurassic, about 150 million years ago, the Great Sun Buddha in this corner of the Infinite Void gave a great Discourse to all the assembled elements and energies: to the standing beings, the walking beings, the flying beings, and the sitting beings—even grasses, to the number of thirteen billion, each one born from a seed, were assembled there: a Discourse concerning Enlightenment on the planet Earth.

"In some future time, there will be a continent called America. It will have great centers of power called such as Pyramid Lake, Walden Pond, Mt. Rainier, Big Sur, Everglades, and so forth; and powerful nerves and channels such as Columbia River, Mississippi River, and Grand Canyon. The human race in that era will get into troubles all over its head, and practically wreck everything in spite of its own strong intelligent Buddha-nature."

"The twisting strata of the great mountains and the pulsings of great volcanoes are my love burning deep in the earth. My obstinate compassion is schist and basalt and granite, to be mountains, to bring down the rain. In that future American Era I shall enter a new form: to cure the world of loveless knowledge that seeks with blind hunger; and mindless rage eating food that will not fill it."

And he showed himself in his true form of
SMOKEY THE BEAR.

A handsome smokey-colored brown bear standing on his hind legs, showing that he is aroused and watchful.

Bearing in his right paw the Shovel that digs to the truth beneath appearances; cuts the roots of useless attachments, and flings damp sand on the fires of greed and war;

His left paw in the Mudra of Comradely Display—indicating that all creatures have the full right to live to their limits and that deer, rabbits, chipmunks, snakes, dandelions, and lizards all grow in the realm of the Dharma;

Wearing the blue work overalls symbolic of slaves and laborers, the countless men oppressed by a civilization that claims to save but only destroys;

Wearing the broad-brimmed hat of the West, symbolic of the forces that guard the Wilderness, which is the Natural State of the Dharma and the True Path of man on earth; all true paths lead through mountains—

With a halo of smoke and flame behind, the forest fires of the kali-yuga, fires caused by the stupidity of those who think things can be gained and lost whereas in truth all is contained vast and free in the Blue Sky and Green Earth of One Mind;

Round-bellied to show his kind nature and that the great earth has food enough for everyone who loves her and trusts her;

Trampling underfoot wasteful freeways and needless suburbs; smashing the worms of capitalism and totalitarianism;

Indicating the Task: his followers, becoming free of cars, houses, canned food, universities, and shoes, master the Three Mysteries of their own Body, Speech, and Mind; and fearlessly chop down the rotten trees and prune out the sick limbs of this country America and then burn the leftover trash.

Wrathful but Calm, Austere but Comic, Smokey the Bear will illuminate those who would help him; but for those who would hinder or slander him,

HE WILL PUT THEM OUT.

Thus his great Mantra:

Namah samanta vajranam chanda maharoshana
Sphataya hum traka ham mam

"I DEDICATE MYSELF TO THE UNIVERSAL DIAMOND
BE THIS RAGING FURY DESTROYED"

And he will protect those who love woods and rivers,
Gods and animals, hobos and madmen, prisoners and sick people, musicians, playful women, and hopeful children;

And if anyone is threatened by advertising, air pollution, or the police, they should chant SMOKEY THE BEAR'S WAR SPELL:

DROWN THEIR BUTTS
CRUSH THEIR BUTTS
DROWN THEIR BUTTS
CRUSH THEIR BUTTS

And SMOKEY THE BEAR will surely appear to put the enemy out with his vajra-shovel.

Now those who recite this Sutra and then try to put it in practice will accumulate merit as countless as the sands of Arizona and Nevada,
Will help save the planet Earth from total oil slick,
Will enter the age of harmony of man and nature,
Will win the tender love and caresses of men, women, and beasts
Will always have ripe blackberries to eat and a sunny spot under a pine tree to sit at,

AND IN THE END WILL WIN HIGHEST PERFECT ENLIGHTENMENT.

thus have we heard.

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/ THE RAG

1978

from page 5

• The mechanisms for community control of land. (This is played down in the report, but Harvey gives high priority to it, says that the leased-shopping center developments proposed in the report must be community owned. This point needs emphasis in the document or it may get lost in the shuffle.)

• The outlining, in clear terms, of District economic needs.

• The recognition of the relationship between discrimination and low income.

• Proposals for specific imaginative projects and approaches.

Several examples of the latter are worth mentioning. One is the citywide development corporation. Another is the development of a community cable television system that offers tremendous potential for communications and education. Still another proposal, the second income plan (which involves the setting up of a trust into which employers can put before-tax profits to provide additional income for employees), certainly seems worth pushing.

It is hard to predict the future of MEDCO's efforts. It seems unlikely that they will be received with open arms by either the Nixon or Washington administration or by Congress. The plan, as a whole, may fall by the wayside. But even at worst, some of the specific proposals may survive and thrive. And that alone will have made the game worth the candle.

ABM

freeways

racism

colonialism

police-community relations

urban renewal

poor schools

bad housing

unemployment

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